

# History of County Boundaries in Nova Scotia

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## **Annapolis County**

Established August 17, 1759 by Order in Council, Annapolis County took its name from the town of Annapolis Royal which had been named in honour of Queen Anne of Great Britain.

By 1833 a number of reasons had been advanced for making two counties out of Annapolis County. Two petitions were presented to the House of Assembly in that year requesting that the county be divided. However, it was not until 1837 that Annapolis County was divided into two distinct and separate counties - Annapolis and Digby.

## **Antigonish County (County of Sydney)**

The County of Sydney was created in 1784. Its boundaries were established by Governor and Council on December 16, 1785

When St. Mary's Township was established in 1818 it was partly in Sydney County and partly in Halifax County. In 1822 that part of St. Mary's Township which had been in Halifax County was annexed to the County of Sydney.

In 1836 Sydney County was diminished in size when Guysborough County was established out of what had been part of it . In 1863 the name of the County of Sydney was changed to Antigonish County. The word Antigonish is of Micmac origin, possibly derived from Nalegitkoonecht meaning "where branches are torn off". It is said that there were bears in the area that broke down branches to get beech nuts.

## **Cape Breton County**

Taking its name from Cape Breton, the most easterly point of Cape Breton Island, which was called after either the Bretons of England or the Bretons of Brittany, this county has what is probably the oldest surviving European name to have been used to designate part of North America.

By proclamation of October 17, 1763 after termination of the Seven Years War, Cape Breton Island was formally annexed to Nova Scotia. For a time thereafter Cape Breton Island was part of Halifax County. On December 10, 1765 Cape Breton Island was set apart as a separate county.

From 1784 to 1820 Cape Breton Island was a separate colony with a Lieutenant Governor and a nominated Council, but without an elected house of assembly. Not until after Cape Breton was reannexed to Nova Scotia in 1820 did it get representation in a house of assembly.

Although subdivided into three districts in 1824, Cape Breton County was co-extensive with Cape Breton Island from 1820 to 1835 when the county was divided into three separate and distinct counties - Cape Breton (Northeastern District), Richmond (Southern District) and Juste au Corps (Northwest District) later called Inverness.

In 1851 Victoria County was formed out of part of Cape Breton County and a year later, in 1852, the boundaries of Cape Breton County were redefined.

### **Additional Note:**

In 1894, a survey of the boundary between Cape Breton County and Victoria County for the area at or near Aconi or Fifes Brook on Boularderie Island was done pursuant to Chapter 14 of the Revised Statutes of Nova Scotia, 1884, "Of Counties, Districts and Townships, and Their Officers". On the plan, the county line appears to follow Aconi Brook (beginning at its mouth) as far as its intersection with the old road to Big Bras D'or. Then line then follows the west side of the aforementioned old road in a northerly direction to meet the rear line of the lots fronting on Big Bras D'Or; then along a course of south 70 degrees west (magnetic 1904) to meet the southwest corner of the Reverend James Fraser's lot: then south 17 degrees east to the Little Bras D;Or (Barra Strait). This would appear to conform very closely with the description given in Chapter 17, Statutes of Nova Scotia 1852.

(Footnote: this information is from records of the Department of Natural Resources.)

## **Colchester County**

The appellation Colchester was applied in 1780 to the district previously called Cobequid, and was derived from the town in Essex England of that name. The old name Cobequid was derived from the Micmac word "Wagobagitk" meaning "the bay runs far up". The District of Colchester which was at first part of Halifax County was established as county in its own right in 1835.

In 1838 a distinct line of division between Cumberland County and Colchester County was established. Two years later, in 1840, the Township of Parrsboro was divided and part of it annexed to Colchester County. In 1871, the lines between the Counties of Hants and Colchester and between the Counties of Halifax and Colchester were established. In 1880 the boundary between the Counties of Halifax and Colchester was revised. Eventually in 1897 a portion of the boundary between the Counties of Colchester and Cumberland was fixed and defined.

The question of the boundary between Colchester and Cumberland Counties was the subject of a Commission of Inquiry established in 1946. The report was filed in the office of the Provincial Secretary and in the office of the Department of Lands and Forests in January 1959. Certified copies of it were sent to the Registrars of Deeds for the Counties of Colchester, Cumberland and Kings.

## **Cumberland County**

The name Cumberland was applied by Lieutenant-Colonel Robert Monckton to the captured Fort Beausejour on June 18, 1755 in honour of the third son of King George II, William Augustus, Duke of Cumberland, victor at Culloden in 1746 and Commander in Chief of the British forces. The old Micmac name for the area was "Kwesomalegek" meaning "hardwood point".

Cumberland County was created on August 17, 1759 by order of the Governor and Council. When the Township of Parrsboro was divided in 1840, one part was annexed to Cumberland County and the other part annexed to Colchester.

The dividing line between Cumberland and Colchester was established by statute in 1840. On June 29, 1880 the Lieutenant Governor and Council authorized the Attorney General to appoint a surveyor to establish and trace out boundary lines between the District of Parrsboro and Cumberland proper. Subsequently, in 1897, a portion of the boundary line between the Counties of Colchester and Cumberland was fixed and defined.

The question of the boundary between Colchester and Cumberland Counties was decided

as a result of a Commission of Inquiry appointed in 1946. The resulting boundaries were filed in the office of the Provincial Secretary and the office of the Department of Lands and Forests in January 1959. Certified copies of it were sent to the Registrars of Deeds for the Counties of Colchester, Cumberland, and Kings.

## **Digby County**

Taking its name from the Township of Digby, which had been named in honour of Rear Admiral Robert Digby who dispatched the Atlanta to convey loyalists from New York in the spring of 1783 to Conway, which became known as Digby, Digby County was established in 1837. Previously, from August 17, 1759, when Nova Scotia was first divided into counties, this area had been part of Annapolis County.

Twenty-four years later, in 1861, Digby County was divided into two districts - the District of Digby and the District of Clare.

## **Guysborough County**

Taking its name from the Township of Guysborough, which was named in honour of Sir Guy Carlton, Guysborough County was created when Sydney County (Antigonish County) was divided in 1836.

Four years later, in 1840, the Township of St. Mary's, in Guysborough County, was set off as a separate and distinct District. In 1863 the dividing line between Halifax and Guysborough Counties was altered and a polling district was added to Guysborough County.

Subsequently, the dividing line between Pictou County and Guysborough County became rather uncertain and in 1866 a Commission of Crown Lands was authorized to appoint a surveyor to establish the boundary. Although the commissioners appointed to look after the interests of Pictou and Guysborough Counties, respectively, both signed the surveyors report, it soon became evident they were in agreement upon only part of the line between those two counties. At a meeting of the Court of General Sessions of the Peace for the District of Guysborough in the County of Guysborough, held on January 19, 1867, it was resolved the Commissioner of Crown Lands be requested to decide the residue of the boundary line.

Moreover, in April 1875, the Lieutenant Governor and Council ordered the Commissioner of Crown Lands to make a survey of the line between Halifax and Guysborough Counties.

Subsequently at its April session, 1913, the Municipal Council of the Municipality of Guysborough declared that the boundary line between the Municipalities of Guysborough and St. Mary's had become uncertain and that it was necessary to establish it anew in

order to avoid litigation to which the un certainty could lead. Pursuant to the request of that Municipal Council, the Lieutenant Governor and Council on March 23, 1914 authorized the appointment of a surveyor to run out that boundary line and to set up permanent marks upon it.

## **Halifax County**

Deriving its name from George Montagu Dunk, second Earl of Halifax (1716-1771) who as President of the Board of Trade aided in the foundation of Halifax and in the colonization of Nova Scotia, Halifax County was established by Order in-Council on August 17, 1759. The boundaries of four other counties - Annapolis, Kings, Cumberland and Lunenburg -were specifically defined at that time, with Halifax County comprising all the part of peninsular Nova Scotia that was not comprehended within their limits.

Following the Seven Years War, Cape Breton Island was formally annexed to Nova Scotia. For a time it formed part of Halifax County.

Although the creation of Queens County in 1762 and of Hants County in 1781 caused no change in its size, two develop ments in 1784 did alter the boundaries of Halifax County. Cape Breton Island was cut off from it and made a separate colony that year. Two new counties - Shelburne and Sydney (Antigonish) - were established in the same year, with Sydney County being formed out of what had previously been part of Halifax County.

The boundaries of Halifax County were modified in 1822. By an Order-In-Council of that year that part of St. Mary's Township (established in 1818) which had been in Halifax County was annexed to and included within Sydney County.

Subsequently, various lines were surveyed and con firmed and the dividing line between the Districts of Halifax and Colchester was confirmed and established on May 3, 1828. In 1835, Halifax County was divided and the Counties of Colchester and Pictou were created out of parts of what had hitherto been Halifax County. That which had been the District of Colchester now became Colchester County; that which had been the District of Pictou now became Pictou County and that which had been the District of Halifax now became Halifax County.

A minor change was made in the boundaries between the Counties of Halifax and Guysborough in 1863 by means of a small area being added to Guysborough County. Subsequently in 1871 part of the line of the Counties of Colchester and Halifax was established by statute. Eventually in 1880 the boundary between the Counties of Halifax and Colchester was fixed.

## **Hants County**

Ultimately getting its name from the County of South Hampton in England, popularly

called Hampshire, and abbreviated to Hants, Hants County was established in 1781 out of part of what had been Kings County. The words of the minutes of the Council of Nova Scotia for June 17, 1781 make it clear that the distance from Horton (the County town of Kings County) and the inconvenience of crossing the Avon River to transact county business were factors which led to a separate county being formed.

Four and a half years later its boundaries were more precisely defined and set forth by the Governor and Council in 1785. The boundary lines of Hants were duly surveyed and confirmed by the Lieutenant Governor 1828.

Subsequently in 1861, Hants County was divided into two Districts called East Hants and West Hants.

### **Inverness County**

Established as the County of Juste au Corps in 1835, Inverness County was given its present name in 1837. It was called Inverness after Inverness in Scotland, the land from which many of the early settlers came. The boundaries of Inverness County had been previously defined when Cape Breton Island was divided by statute into three Districts in 1823.

Inverness County was established within the boundaries of the Northwestern District of Cape Breton Island.

### **Kings County**

With its name as an expression of loyalty, Kings County was established by the Governor and Council of Nova Scotia on August 17, 1759 at a time when King George II was king.

Kings County was subsequently reduced in size with the creation of Hants County of June 17, 1781. Four and a half years later, in 1785, the Governor-In-Council authorized boundaries for Kings County. The lines were run and marked in the years 1821-1824. Subsequently the Lieutenant Governor confirmed and established a number of lines on May 3, 1828, including the line between King and Annapolis Counties.

The Township of Parrsboro was cut off from Kings in 1840, with one part of it being annexed to Cumberland County and the other part being joined to Colchester County.

### **Lunenburg County**

Presumably named in honor of the monarch, who was then also Duke of Brunswick - Luneburg, Lunenburg County was established in 1759, when peninsular Nova Scotia was divided into five counties. Three years later Lunenburg County was reduced in size when

Queens County was established. Following the establishment of Queens County in 1762, Hants County in 1781, and Shelburne and Sydney Counties in 1784, the boundaries of all nine of the counties were defined by the Council of Nova Scotia. Subsequently, surveys of the lines and boundaries of the various counties and districts of the province were made during the years 1820-25 and those of Lunenburg County were among those that were run and marked.

After considering the report of the Surveyor General, the Lieutenant Governor and Council, on May 3, 1828 declared the boundaries of Lunenburg County.

By Chapter 52 of the Statutes of 1863 the Township of Chester in the County of Lunenburg was made a separate District for certain specified purposes. That Statute provided authority for the appointment of a Custos Rotulorum and for the establishment of a general sessions of the peace for the District of Chester, with the same powers as if it were a separate county.

## **Pictou County**

Pictou was long in use as the name of a place before Pictou County was established in 1835. The word "Pictou" is derived from the Mic Mac "Piktook" meaning an explosion of gas. The area which eventually became Pictou County was a part of Halifax County from 1759 to 1835.

In 1803 when the Legislature of the Provinces considered the possibility of increasing the number of counties, a committee of the House of Assembly proposed that three additional counties be established. It was suggested that these proposed counties be named Weymouth, Pictou, and Colchester Counties. However, the report was deferred and the District of Pictou was not raised to a county at this time. Twenty-two years elapsed before that occurred.

In 1835, the then County of Halifax was divided into three different and distinct counties. The County of Halifax was to comprise and include the then District of Halifax; the County of Colchester was to comprise the then District of Colchester and the County of Pictou was to comprise and include the then District of Pictou. Thus the District of Pictou was elevated to the status of a county in 1835.

Subsequently, the dividing line between Pictou County and Guysborough County became rather uncertain and on July 19, 1866 the Lieutenant Governor and Council authorized the Commissioner of Crown Lands to appoint a surveyor to run the line and set permanent marks upon it. A difference of opinion between the commissioners appointed to represent Guysborough and Pictou Counties respectively resulted in the Commissioner of Crown Lands being requested in 1867 to determine a line between the Counties of Pictou and Guysborough.

## **Queens County**

On July 21, 1762 the Lieutenant Governor and Council of Nova Scotia declared that "the Townships of Liverpool, Barrington and Yarmouth together with the intermediate lands should be erected into a county by the name of Queens County". It has been inferred that Queens County was cut off from Lunenburg County. However, a description of Lunenburg County in the minutes of the Council of Nova Scotia of August 17, 1759 is such that Lunenburg County was stated to be bounded south westerly by the River Rossignol and Port Senior (the site of the Township of Liverpool which was settled in the next year). In any case, Lunenburg was reduced in size when Queens County was established.

In 1784 Queens County was diminished in extent with the establishment of Shelburne County. Shelburne County was cut off from Queens County. The boundaries of the new county and the boundaries of the older county were established by Order-in-Council December 16, 1785.

Subsequently, surveys of the lines and boundaries of the various counties were made in the years 1820-25 and those of Queens County were among those that were run and marked. The Lieutenant Governor and Council declared the boundaries of Queens County in 1828.

## **Richmond County**

Named in honour of Sir Charles Lennox, fourth Duke of Richmond and Lennox, who was Governor General of British North America 1818-1819, Richmond County was created in 1835.

Richmond County comprises that territory known as the Southern District which was established in 1824 at the time of the dividing of Cape Breton Island into three districts. The boundaries of the Southern District were defined at the time of its establishment. Those same boundaries were determined to be the boundaries of Richmond County by statute in 1847.

## **Shelburne County**

Named after Lord Shelburne, who was Prime Minister of Great Britain in 1782-1783, Shelburne County was established in 1784. That name had been applied by Governor Parr to a rising loyalist settlement the previous year, and now it was also given to a new county in which that settlement was the County town. The boundaries of Shelburne County were afterwards established by Governor and Council on December 16, 1785.

In 1824, at a time when the lines of a number of counties were being cut out and marked, the boundary between Queens and Shelburne Counties was surveyed.



Nine years later, in 1833, the Township of Argyle was established and its limits were defined. Subsequently, in 1836 Shelburne County was divided into two separate and distinct counties with Yarmouth County being formed out of what had been part of Shelburne County and with Shelburne County being thus reduced in size.

When in 1837, Annapolis County was divided and Digby County was created out of what had formerly been part of Annapolis County, modification in the wording of the description of Shelburne County became necessary. This was achieved by An Act Relative to the Boundary Line between the Counties of Shelburne and Yarmouth.

Eventually, in 1854, Shelburne County was divided into two districts - the District of Shelburne and the District of Barrington. It was declared that the District of Shelburne would comprise the Township of Shelburne and the District of Barrington would comprise the Township of Barrington.

## **Victoria County**

Called after the Queen, Victoria County was established by statute in 1851. Cape Breton County was divided into two counties in that year, with Victoria County being cut off from it. This was done by Statute 14 Victoria IV. In 1852, by Chapter 17 of the Statutes of that year, the second section of Act 14, Vic. IV was repealed and a revised description substituted.

(See also under Cape Breton County: "Additional Note".)

## **Yarmouth County**

The name Yarmouth appeared as the name of a projected township in Nova Scotia in a document in 1759, perhaps because it was the name of a favourite of George II. The same name was applied to a new county in 1836 when Yarmouth County was cut off from Shelburne County.

The description of Yarmouth County was modified in 1846.

In 1856 Argyle was established as a separate district, with the District of Argyle comprising the Township of Argyle.

**Source:** The Boundaries of Nova Scotia and its Counties by Charles Bruce Fergusson, Provincial Archivist, Public Archives of Nova Scotia, 1966.